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THE EFFICIENCY OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE TEACHER

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In 1920 the Seattle Principals' Association made a study of the functions of the principal.¹ The association continued the study in 1921 by an investigation of the teachers' view of the possibilities of the principalship. The following questionnaire was sent to each teacher in the city:

The Seattle Principals' Association, in continuing the study of the functions of the principal begun last year, wishes the teachers to assist in standardizing ideals and essential routine duties. The association is, therefore, asking the teachers to answer the following questions thoughtfully, deliberately, and impersonally. The answer need not be signed but should be sealed in an envelope and placed in the B. F. Day School box by Monday, October 3.

How may the principal be of most help to the teacher?

I. In a professional way (professional leadership, course of study, the exceptional child, etc.)

II. In an administrative way (general building régime, furnishing equipment and supplies, etc.)

III. In personal relationships (mannerisms, temperament, personal qualities, etc.)

While most of the principals took the matter seriously and urged the teachers to comply with the request, but 300 out of a total of 1,500 teachers filled out the questionnaire. Although this represents but 20 per cent of the corps, it is possibly a sufficient number upon which to base some definite conclusions. In fact, in tabulating the returns, it was noted that the last 150 replies did not change the relative importance as determined by the first 150 returns. An effort was made to have the replies made in an impersonal manner. In this the committee was quite successful,

¹ Worth McClure, "The Functions of the Elementary-School Principal," *Elementary School Journal*, XXI (March, 1921), 500-514.

as but seven teachers were personal in replying to the first item and but twenty-five in replying to the second and third items. The returns follow:

I. PROFESSIONAL

1. *The exceptional child*.—In the care of the exceptional child, 104 teachers, or 37 per cent, indicated that valuable assistance could be given and that much responsibility could well be assumed by the principal. The replies classified the exceptional pupils as follows: (a) the subnormal child, (b) the gifted child, and (c) the delinquent or troublesome child.

2. *Course of study*.—Eighty-three teachers, or 29 per cent, indicated that the principal could be of much assistance with the course of study. Sixteen, or 6 per cent, asked for some freedom in applying the course of study to local situations.

3. *Professional leadership*.—Fifty-eight teachers, or 20 per cent, indicated that the principal could be of assistance as a professional leader. While this was a general suggestion to the principal, many were definite in this matter. Fifty-one, or 18 per cent, suggested that the principal call their attention to the best current educational literature. Thirty-one, or 11 per cent, asked for some pedagogic advice. Twenty-two, or 7 per cent, indicated that the principal should be inspirational in the classrooms, in meetings, and in conferences. Twenty, or about 7 per cent, indicated that the principal should hold meetings where discussion is free, with the teachers often leading. Seventeen, or about 6 per cent, suggested that the principal do some demonstration teaching. They indicated three advantages in such teaching: (a) an opportunity to try the new course of study, (b) an opportunity better to understand conditions, and (c) an inspiration to teachers and pupils. Fourteen teachers, or about 4 per cent, suggested that the principal protect and develop the originality of the teacher.

4. *Miscellaneous suggestions*:

a) Six teachers suggested that the principal know quite intimately the new reference material supplied to the schools.

b) An equal number indicated that the teachers' larger problems should be uppermost in the principal's mind.

- c) Two asked that the principal have no pet hobbies.
- d) Two others asked that the principal attend all meetings of the supervisors to understand requirements better.
- e) Thirteen suggested that the principal be democratic and that suggestions of a professional character be made freely.
- f) Six asked that the principal visit the rooms frequently enough to know accurately the conditions and then to confer regarding the work.
- g) One teacher asked that the principal represent the teacher in the community.
- h) Three teachers suggested that the principal know the district and the homes and secure the necessary co-operation.
- i) One teacher suggested that the principal know the personnel of his corps.

The following replies are quoted verbatim:

In the modern languages, which naturally require highly specialized preparation, the average high-school principal cannot be of direct help to the teacher but may be of great help indirectly by setting a high standard of professional perfection and ethics and by his general attitude of helpfulness and encouragement. He may be of service to inexperienced teachers in matters of general teaching ability, discipline, etc. His chief asset in dealing with modern language teachers is a kind, helpful, sympathetic attitude.

A principal who is interested in and takes part in the educational activities of the community is an inspirational help to the teacher.

The principal can be of most help to me in giving constructive criticism. That is the kind I have received in the Seattle schools since I came.

By being such an enthusiastic follower of the teaching profession that he is an inspiration to his teacher.

He should be interested enough in educational movements and problems to inspire his teachers to be alert in these respects and to give of his knowledge and experience.

Investigate the needs of individual pupils and help to solve such problems.

Set a high professional standard for himself.

By trying to make his visits to every room an inspiration and encouragement to both the teacher and pupils.

It seems to me the most helpful principal is the one who can see the big worth-while things the classroom teacher is trying to do and who can appreciate the teacher's efforts as a character builder and assist her in a wise and thoughtful way and learn to disregard such petty things as blackboards.

A principal may be so familiar with the course of study that a teacher feels him a competent and fair judge. This holds the teacher to a higher standard.

The principal who gave me the greatest assistance in my early days of teaching showed me how to vitalize the course of study or, as he said, "to teach the boy, not the subject."

By holding highly desirable professional goals; by fostering a spirit of studied, scholarly effort to attain these goals; by knowing modern educational methods so that he recognizes what will attain these goals; by offering constructive criticism that will assist in attaining these goals; by acknowledging progress toward such goals.

Helping the teacher to avoid narrowness in professional outlook.

Each principal should aim to secure an assistant to take care of the routine duties. Thus the principal can use his time in co-operation with teachers, studying conditions, solving problems, and carrying out his professional ideas.

I think the principal may be of most help to the teachers by constantly urging them to do university extension work or some outside studying that will help them raise their professional standards.

By taking a sympathetic and personal interest in the exceptional child.

The exceptional child needs to come in contact with another person in the school to realize that his teacher is not the only one interested in influencing him to become a good citizen. This help needs to be given outside of the classroom.

The principal should keep up with new ideas and thoughts in education through study and association with educators. Then he should pass this knowledge on to his teachers so that they will get the vision.

Be a student in the educational field.

Teachers welcome anything that widens their horizon in or out of school. Some principals inspire their teachers toward a fuller life, better positions, or contentment in the places they are filling.

The teachers need in the principal aggressive leadership for higher standards of scholarship and conduct. Cold co-operation, indifference, or laxness on his part makes the teacher's place hard. Overemphasis on athletics and favors to those who take part in them have a tendency to lower standards.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE

1. *Supplies and equipment.*—Fifty per cent of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire gave suggestions that are readily classified as administrative in character. They indicate that supplies should be on hand when needed, especially at the beginning of the year. Furthermore, supplies and equipment should be delivered to the teacher without delay.

The principal is advised to order "up to the limit" specified by the different courses of study. This enables the teacher to choose materials and thus employ her originality in planning work. A close check upon the stockroom should be kept so that supplies will not run too low.

A regular time for the teacher to order and receive her supplies should be the rule. Provision for the emergency requisition and for getting supplies on back order ought also to be made. Certain kinds of supplies and equipment might well be available without the necessity of requisitioning, e.g., colored paper, paints, paper cutter, etc.

2. *Well-defined system.*—Twenty-eight per cent of those who reported pointed out that the principal should be a good manager. The building régime should be well defined and well understood by both teachers and pupils. New teachers and new pupils should be informed with regard to building regulations. As one teacher put it, "A new teacher should not have to err in order to learn the building régime."

Whenever changes are contemplated, the teachers should be consulted with a view to ascertaining the opinion of the majority.

A well-defined system ought always to be tempered by the human element.

3. *Distribution of the building load.*—The building load is considered a positive factor. Thirteen per cent of the teachers said that each teacher should assume her part of the responsibility. In order that the distribution of service may bring the most good,

special talents should be ascertained and used as far as possible. It was pointed out that teachers prefer to assume certain responsibilities and that they as well as the school are benefited thereby.

A portion of the building load naturally belongs to the principal. He should articulate this function with any of the teachers' obligations that are related.

4. *Avoidance of interruptions—saving teachers' time.*—Nine per cent of the teachers offered a note of caution here. As far as possible, the regular sessions ought to be protected from interruptions. Only the most urgent communications should be presented to the teacher at such times. The interruption of a recitation that is just reaching a climax is often a serious embarrassment. It is frequently impossible after the interruption to clinch successfully the lesson.

5. *Teachers' meetings.*—Five per cent of the group agreed that conferences should be short, definite, and worth while. Furthermore, they should be regulated as to number.

6. *Course in school administration.*—Three teachers suggested that a course in school administration be required of all candidates for elementary-school principalships.

III. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. *The higher human qualities.*—The importance in this field of the qualities of justice, courtesy, sympathy, appreciation, impartiality, etc., was emphasized by 60 per cent of the teachers. The principal should strive to exemplify these attributes of character. He is constantly called upon to weigh more or less delicate questions with an obligation to render judgment. He must view both sides of the question as a matter of habit.

The following points are presented as an index of the suggestions made by the teachers:

a) The atmosphere of the building is determined by the principal.

b) The principal should be not merely accessible but approachable.

c) He should, in some way, show appreciation of worthy work or worthy effort.

- d) He should be a lover of children.
- e) Helpfulness, serenity, and dignity should be radiated by him.
- f) He should enter the room with a pleasant air and make all feel comfortable.
- g) It is his duty to support the teacher as between (1) teacher and pupil and (2) teacher and parent.

2. *Constructive criticism*.—Sixteen per cent of the teachers went on record as welcoming prompt and constructive criticism. This policy gives the teacher immediate benefit of specific suggestions that are to be used to improve the work of the classroom.

It is asserted that this plan can be followed in an atmosphere of encouragement and without tenseness. Furthermore, it has its refinements, as one teacher's statement indicates: "By being able at times to show appreciation or disapproval without speaking; by ability to see the ideal toward which the unsatisfactory and sometimes chaotic reality is tending." Then, too, this matter points in two directions: "A principal should be broadminded enough to appreciate helpful criticism given by the teachers in his building."

Whatever the method employed in criticism, there should be the quality of definiteness and frankness that does not suggest diplomacy and does not leave the teacher baffled or uncertain.

3. *Poise*.—Seven per cent of the reports contained suggestions the gist of which can be discerned from the following verbatim statements:

- a) Be so sure and firm that no combinations of trouble can possibly daunt you.
- b) An example of dignity, especially in the presence of the pupils.
- c) Should be as courteous and polite as the pupils are expected to be.
- d) Exhibit gentility, at least to a sufficient degree to compare favorably with men of big business whom the corps, pupils, and patrons meet outside of the school environment. Exemplify poise under all conditions.